

JEFFERSON, THOMAS

DRAWING 26

COMPARISON

71 2003 086 01236



Abraham Lincoln Comparisons

Thomas Jefferson

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

BOTH MASTERS OF RHETORIC

Scholarly Consideration of the Literary Styles of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson.

1923

In American letters we fix on Abraham Lincoln as our type of natural expression; the legend of his humbleness and the plainness of his manner deceive us into a conviction that he was less indebted to art than Thomas Jefferson, and we therefore talk of the rhetorical extravagances of the Declaration and contrast them with the Attic simplicities of the Gettysburg address. John Erskine writes in the North American Review. Perhaps we see a final proof of our sound taste in the story that Matthew Arnold gave up the address for lost when he got to the colloquial "proposition"; "dedicated to the proposition," we say, was more than his artificial spirit could bear. Whether Arnold expressed such an opinion, or whether he would have been right in so doing, is of less consequence, than our emotional readiness, if we cultivate the natural, to accept the Lincoln speech as an illustration of our ideal, and to set it over against the artifice of Jefferson's great document—to detect a literary manner in such a phrase as "When in the course of human events," and nothing but naturalness in "Fourscore and seven years ago"—or to find an empty and sounding rhetoric in "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," but only the democratic syllables of common sense in "government of the people, by the people, for the people." Both documents are as rich as they can well be in rhetoric, as all great oratory is, and of the two Lincoln's, as a matter of fact, is rather more artful in the progress of its ideas.

Lincoln and Jefferson

By EDWIN D. MEAD

The new book by the author of the "Spoon River Anthology," Mr Masters, on "Lincoln, the Man," is in line with the sundry books on "The True Franklin," "The True Washington," and the other "true" worthies, to which we are getting used. The titles are always a warning; they usually herald an omnium gatherum by an order of mind to which "truth" means gossip, minds destitute of any philosophy of history or of life or any dominant interest in the larger and central significance of their subject, but capable of assiduous search for a class of facts which appeal to the great company of yet smaller minds of the species. They relish implications that great men are small like themselves. On the backstairs all men look much alike. The great flock of Philistines who believe that they are "as good as anybody" are fortified and fed by the exhibition of any trait or chapter in the lives of great men that is akin to their own small outlook or experience. "A hero is none to his valet," runs the proverb. "That," well says Hegel, "is not because the hero is not a hero, but because the valet is a valet."

We had a case of this sort of literature in a recent book on the early life of Washington. It angered and humiliated many of us. But Albert Bushnell Hart was not content with being angry. He checked it up, and in a detailed paper before the Massachusetts Historical society brought out the fact that he had listed over 600 demonstrable misstatements in the book. It was a timely performance and propitiously cleared the ground of that particular rubbish just as we approach the Washington bicentenary.

A Similar Attack

Four or five years ago came a similar book on Henry Ward Beecher, prompted by some motive at this time of day inscrutable. Beecher, it appeared, was the typical and supreme illustration of the American worship of success, shiftiness, keeping the ear to the ground, and running with the crowd. The main motive of traducing Beecher appeared in the devotion of half of the book to the details of the old Tilton scandal. Quite beyond the power of the casual 1930 reader to dispose of, piling up pages of the allegations against Beecher and hardly noticing their rebuttal, which was complete enough to convince three-quarters of the jury and win unanimous exoneration of Beecher from the great convention of ministers who considered the case. The wide and vigorous discussion of the book simply served to bring back Beecher in his many-sided greatness more distinctly to the public mind.

Phillips Brooks once said in a famous tribute to Beecher, long after the notorious controversy which this scavenger rehashed, that he was far the greatest preacher America ever had. Certainly he had no peer save Brooks himself. Not only was he our pre-eminent preacher, but he was a con-

secrated and untiring reformer in the whole field of our religious and political life. Only Theodore Parker in the pulpit rendered service comparable with his in the long and bitter fight with slavery. No man did more in impeaching and reforming the rigid old theology. When practically the whole American church was denouncing Darwin and the doctrine of evolution, he almost alone welcomed the doctrine and became its bold apostle. So far from being a conformist and a trimmer, he was the fearless fighter of popular prejudice and the crowd his whole life long; and the untimely attack upon his memory simply served, I say, to fix public thought anew upon him and reveal anew his noble nature and service in their great proportions. Such will be the service of this new backstairs book about Lincoln.

It is indeed too late in the day for petty attempts upon the fame of Abraham Lincoln, which looms so grandly, and this untimely anti-Lincoln book will prove negligible. I recur to it for two specific reasons. The writer of the book chooses to bring Lincoln into distinct contrast and opposition to Jefferson. "Lincoln was not great at all, but Jefferson was a very great man." The book is dedicated to "the memory of Thomas Jefferson," the "greatest of the Presidents." Lincoln, the enemy according to the theory of the principles of Jefferson, crushed the principles of free government in the republic. The war which he conducted was "an invasion and subjugation of the southern states" by "a power wholly usurped." This word shows the real animus of the book. One had thought that this species was extinct, but it is not. The writer's further point is that Lincoln was "ignorant of American history and of the meaning of the constitution." His specific historical lack was a "well-based opinion on secession."

Assiduous and Accurate Student of History

The truth is that Lincoln was a most assiduous and accurate student of our history, and especially of the framing and adoption of the constitution and the organization of the Northwest, of everything which affected the great controversy in which he was called to take so responsible a part. The whole series of the debates with Douglas, with the great Cooper union address of 1860 which continued and summarized that argument, was throughout a constant appeal to our political history for the 70 years following the adoption of the constitution and the years immediately preceding; and every careful student of that famous forensic chapter knows the thoroughness of Lincoln's historical knowledge and the firmness of his grasp.

What is the "well-based opinion on secession" warranted by the historical saints of our Spoon River Lincolnphobist? Does he know what Jefferson said, and Madison? Does he think that

Jefferson's Kentucky resolutions and Madison's Virginia resolutions, of 1798 and 1799, sanctioned secession? The two were written for the same purpose and meant the same thing and neither remotely sanctioned secession. As Mr Masters is such a stickler for historical knowledge, and so presumably a historical authority, he is surely familiar with Madison's letter to Hamilton when Hamilton was in the thick of his mighty effort for the ratification of the constitution in the New York convention in 1788.

The right of secession, Madison wrote, was never contemplated by the framers of the constitution, and was preposterous; no government could provide for its own destruction. Let Mr Masters refresh himself much more on Madison's special disquisition on the subject in 1835, following the nullification agitation in South Carolina. He specifically denied that the notions of Calhoun then bruited had any relation to his principles and Jefferson's or found any support in the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions. Madison and Jefferson and Hamilton, the last so different from the other two, in general theories of politics and government, all thought alike on that subject; and they thought as Lincoln thought.

The attempt to exhibit Lincoln in opposition to Jefferson is as ridiculous as it is abominable, and shows gross ignorance indeed of elementary and fundamental facts of our political history. It is the climax of the ironical and fatuous performances in recent political discussion. Lincoln was Jefferson's disciple and his greatest disciple. The most memorable tribute to Jefferson which exists is Lincoln's tribute; as Jefferson's own tribute to Washington is the most memorable tribute to Washington. We in Boston can not forget that Lincoln's letter embodying that great tribute to Jefferson was addressed to a Republican Jefferson celebration in Boston, the year before his election.

Invoking the Principles of Jefferson

It is impossible here to quote largely from that famous message, nor is it necessary. Indeed, it can be fittingly considered only in its integrity. "The principles of Jefferson," Lincoln wrote, "are the definitions and axioms of free society." And when the talk is of "crushing the principles of free government" it must be remembered that it was precisely here that Lincoln, invoking those great principles of Jefferson, about which southern Democrats at that critical hour were

ent, proclaimed them "applicable to men and all times, a rebuke and umbling-block to the harbingers of appearing tyranny and oppression." Many men even in New England forget that the new Republican party, in its famous Philadelphia platform of 1856, dedicated itself to restoring the federal government to "the principles of Washington and Jefferson." Two years before that, in one of his Illinois speeches Lincoln had spoken of Jefferson as being and likely to continue to be our greatest political thinker. Lincoln and Jefferson stand politically for the same thing.

As illustrating alike Lincoln's love of Jefferson and his exact use of history, it may be said that in the standard edition of Lincoln's writings there are indexed 41 references to Jefferson. I have had occasion to verify these references, and every one of them is accurate and bears witness to his thorough critical study and his keen perception of the pregnancy of Jefferson's thought and efforts, especially his antislavery effort in the proposed ordinance of 1784, in their bearing upon the great cause to which his own life was devoted. Jefferson was the preeminent antislavery man among the founders of the republic.

I do not know where Spoon river is. It is a fair surmise that it flows into the Dead sea. I understand that the "Spoon River Anthology" is devoted to ransacking among graves and tombs. It is to that and to cheap gossip about those sides of Lincoln's life, especially his early life, which are least important, that this ill-born book is devoted. The writer laboriously digs up a lot of stuff which it were well to leave buried, petty things in no way discreditable to the growing Lincoln, but heaped together here with the mean aim to vulgarize and dwarf him because he did not take the southern view in the Civil war. It is hard for the normal man to divine what satisfaction or delight a historical workman takes in such a vocation.

For Chroniclers of Small Beer

Lincoln's early life slightly concerns the broad student of history and of Lincoln himself. His momentous development in character and power was during the awful responsibilities of his four years as President in the Civil war. But any man who has not discovered that already in 1858 Abraham Lincoln was a great man confesses judgment on his brains. Of his early life Lincoln himself once said that it was all told in the single line: "The short and simple annals of the poor." That he was born in the deepest destitution and obscurity simply adds to his glory by its accentuation of the potency of his genius and his aspiration. About the trivialities of his early struggles and the ups and downs of later courts and caucuses, the serious American does not care to know much and does not need to know. These are the luscious things for chroniclers of small beer and the opportunity for addition to a crop of books already much too large. It was no ordinary young man who at the age of 20 made such an impression on William Cullen Bryant in his accidental evening with him at the tavern in the Illinois village, and whom he met next 30 years afterwards when he presided at his great Cooper union meeting.

Before me as I write is an article in a paper of today, upon "The Autopsy upon an 'Immortal'—no matter upon whom or what. There can be no autopsy upon the immortal. Stanton said truly of Lincoln as he died, "Now he belongs to the ages." He is of the immortals. Spoon River attempts at his autopsy can only bring discomfiture to Spoon River, because the subject quite transcends Spoon River tools.

Such categories indeed as that to which immortality pertains make no appeal to our Lincoln hater. He brings

it against Lincoln that he was the first President to introduce the "cant and hypocrisy" of appeal to Christianity and God into American politics. The talk of God in politics seems to be as repugnant to him as it is to some Russian folk in this same year of grace. He is mistaken, however, as to Lincoln's religious priority; Lincoln was indeed more reticent than almost any other in his religious language. Jefferson—not here to mention Washington—in the very Declaration of Independence appealed to "the laws of Nature and of Nature's God" and invoked for the nation in that hour of its birth "the protection of divine Providence"; and in the last words of his inaugural address as President he invoked for himself and for his country the guidance of "the Infinite Power which rules the destinies of the universe."

Boston, February 11, 1931. A. E.

PETTENGILL

"The Gentleman from Indiana"

'Inside Your Congress'

Release No. 71

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LINCOLN A JEFFERSONIAN DEMOCRAT

It is quite appropriate that Indiana should house the largest collection of Lincolniana in the world, for Lincoln's formative years were lived in that State. This collection is that of the Lincoln National Life Foundation of Ft. Wayne, Indiana. It now contains 4600 books, 3000 magazine articles, and over 50,000 newspaper clippings, all dealing with Abraham Lincoln. Last year 92 new Lincoln books and pamphlets came off the press. Today it is certainly true in America and probably throughout the world that more has been written about Lincoln than any person other than biblical characters. Until 1916 Napoleon Bonaparte enjoyed that distinction, but since then Lincoln has been considered the most important of all historical figures.

In this library this vast store of information has been carefully indexed, covering more than 3000 phases of Lincoln's life and character.

Only the other day there came into the possession of this library material which so far as is known does not appear in any other collection of Lincolniana. It is a series of campaign leaflets under the heading "Lincoln and Liberty", issued from week to week in 1860, following Lincoln's nomination. In one of these leaflets Lincoln is described by his political friends as a "Jeffersonian democrat".

This interested me greatly. In my first campaign for Congress in 1930, running as a Jeffersonian democrat in a district predominantly republican, I argued that Lincoln was a political first cousin of Jefferson. At the time many people were surprised that such a statement

could be seriously made. Now, however, I have contemporaneous historical proof, issued by Lincoln's friends as a political document in a campaign for his support in 1860, directly sustaining the position I took 70 years later.

The proof of the essential agreement of Jefferson and Lincoln on fundamentals is set forth in a chapter in my book, "Jefferson, the Forgotten Man". Let me summarize it here:

The Republican party was organized in 1856. Lincoln was a candidate for the nomination as Vice President. The party platform of that year was dedicated to "restoring the actions of the Federal Government to the principles of Washington and Jefferson". It resolved -

"That the maintenance of the principles promulgated in the Declaration of Independence and embodied in the Federal Constitution are essential to the preservation of our republican institutions, and that the Federal Constitution, the rights of the States, and the Union of the States must be preserved".

This same plank was repeated four years later in 1860 when Lincoln was nominated and elected. The new Republican party was founded by a coalition of Whigs and Free-soil Democrats. One of its founders at the time said:

"There is not a plank in our platform which does not conform to the principles of Jefferson, the man who, of all others, has ever been regarded as the true representative of the Republican party of this country".

It should be borne in mind that the name of Mr. Jefferson's party during his time was the "Republican" party. The word "Democrat" did not come into general use until Andrew Jackson's time, some thirty years later.

Lincoln and Jefferson were both opposed to slavery. Jefferson, in drafting the Declaration of Independence, attempted to secure the adoption of a prohibition against the further extension of slavery. Later, in the ordinance for the government of the Northwest Territory of 1787,

largely influenced by Jefferson, and covering what are now the States of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and Illinois, it was provided:

"There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said Territory otherwise than in the punishment of crimes".

In his last will and testament Jefferson gave freedom to his slaves and requested the legislature of Virginia to confirm their freedom, so that they could live in peace with their families in that State.

Jefferson and Lincoln were also States' rights men. Lincoln wanted Kansas and Nebraska to have the power to determine whether they should be slave or free States, without having slavery imposed upon them against their will by the central government. Lincoln's criticism of the Dred Scott decision of the United States Supreme Court was that it gave the Federal Government too much power over the States, rather than as Roosevelt has criticised that same Court because it gave the Federal Government too little power over the States. Roosevelt's position is directly opposite that of Jefferson and Lincoln.

Finally, in a letter written in 1859, celebrating Jefferson's birthday, Mr. Lincoln said: "The principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of a free society"; and, again, "Soberly, it is now no child's play to save the principles of Jefferson from total overthrow in this nation".

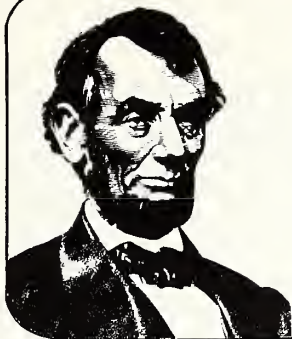
The moral of all this to the Americans of today is so obvious that he who runs may read.

SAMUEL B. PETTENGILL

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Lincoln Lore

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LINCOLN AND THE HATEFUL POET

No one hated Abraham Lincoln as thoroughly as Edgar Lee Masters did. He could find little to admire in Lincoln's personal character and less in the Sixteenth President's political legacy. Masters's book, *Lincoln: The Man* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1931), was a publishing sensation which caused tidal waves of indignation across America. Today, the book and the controversy over it are almost completely forgotten. The book is deservedly forgotten, but the controversy over it merits some attention. It marked the end of an era in popular literature in America. It was something of a turning point in the career of Lincoln's image in modern America. And it revealed here and there some of the great intellectual currents of that era of depression.

Masters was an unlikely Lincoln-hater. Had he written a book which praised Lincoln, reviewers and critics would have found it easy to explain. They would have pointed to Masters's roots in Lincoln country. Though born in Garrett, Kansas, in 1869, Masters grew up near the site which has prompted more sentimental reverie about Lincoln than any other, New Salem. That village became a ghost town even in Lincoln's life, but nearby Petersburg, which took its village life from New Salem's death, survived. There, and in Lewistown, Masters spent his youth. The romance of this Sangamon River country captivated even Masters. His *Spoon River Anthology* (1914), which made Masters famous as a poet, included an oft-quoted epitaph for Ann Rutledge:

Out of me unworthy
and unknown
The vibrations of
deathless music;
"With malice toward
none, with charity
for all."

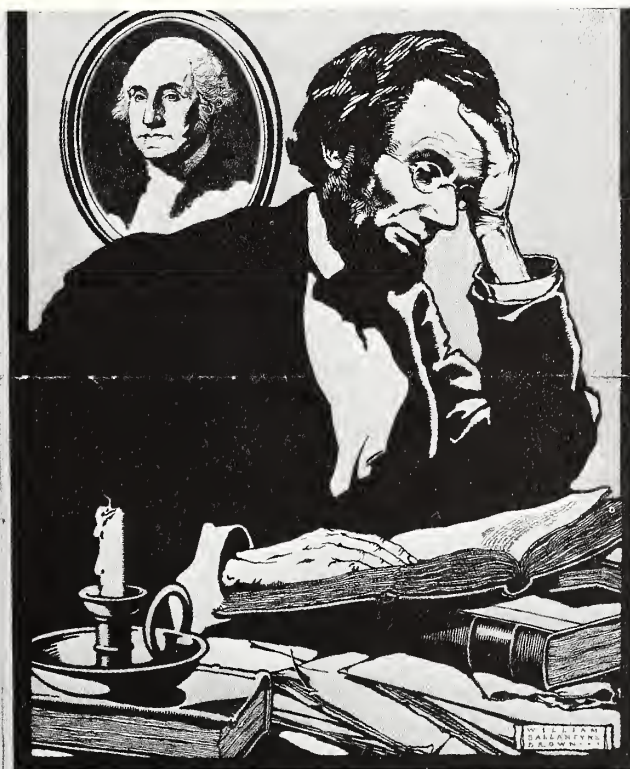
Out of me the
forgiveness of
millions toward
millions,
And the beneficent
face of a nation
Shining with justice
and truth.
I am Anne Rutledge
who sleep beneath
these weeds,

Beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln,
Wedded to him, not through union,
But through separation.
Bloom forever, O Republic.
From the dust of my bosom!

A closer look at Masters's early years reveals that he was both a part of his environment and a man at odds with it. His grandfather was a Democrat with little sympathy for the North during the Civil War. Edgar Lee Masters's father, Hardin W. Masters, ran away to enlist in the army during the war, but his father brought him back. Hardin Masters became a lawyer and dabbled in Democratic politics. He crossed the prohibition-minded Republicans of Lewistown on more than one occasion.

Edgar Lee Masters continued the family tradition of affiliation with the Democratic party. He too became a lawyer, after graduation from Knox College in Galesburg, and established a practice in Chicago. He continued to practice law somewhat unhappily until his literary career allowed him to give it up in 1920.

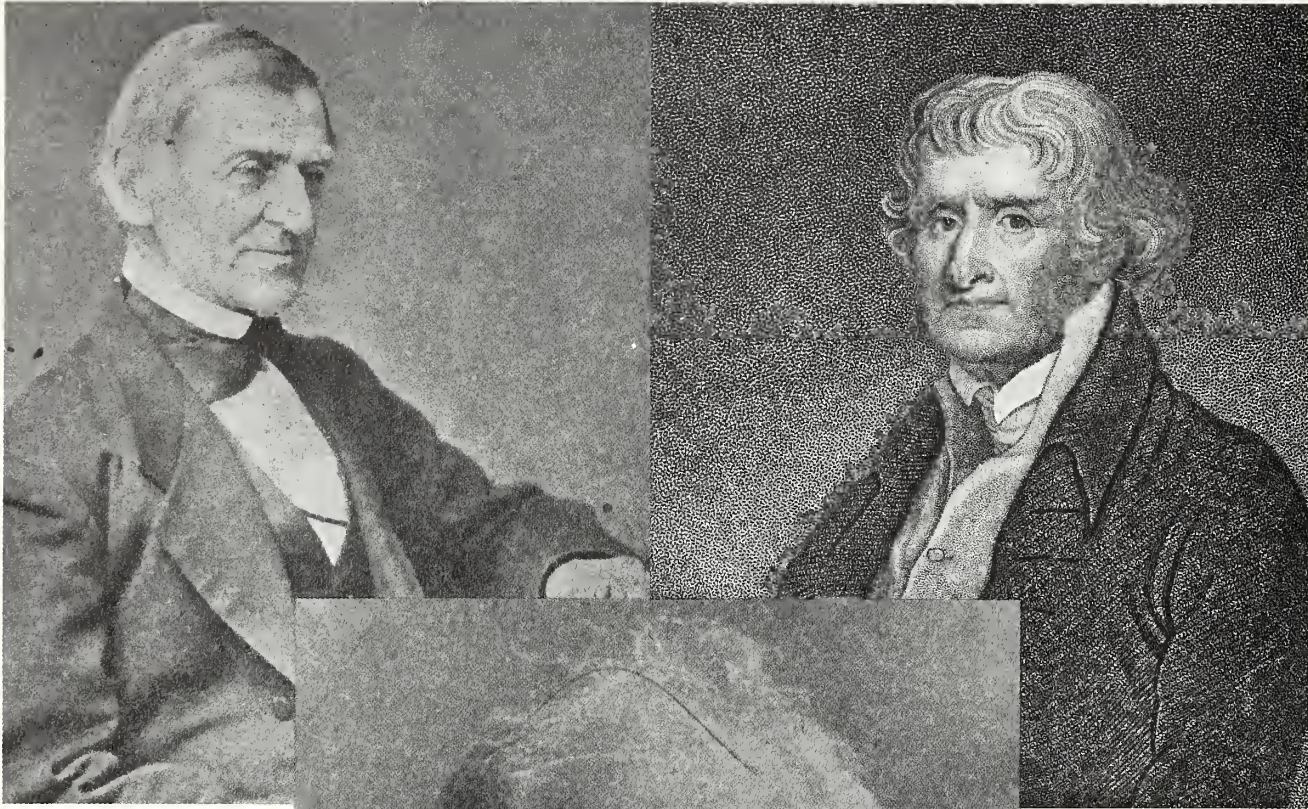
Lincoln: The Man was Edgar Lee Masters's first biography. He had always been interested in politics and in history. Biography was immensely popular in America between the World Wars, in part because a new style of biographical writing titillated the popular imagination. This was the great age of the "debunker," who slayed American heroes in print by the dozens. The prudes and the religiously earnest, like Henry Ward Beecher and William Jennings Bryan, were natural targets for this age of revolt against Victorian morality, but soon the political figures were the objects of attack. George Washington fell to the pen of Rupert Hughes in 1926. *George Washington: The Human Being & The Hero* (New York:



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From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. Before World War I, popular magazines dealt reverentially with Lincoln and Washington. Debunking was not the fashion.



Ralph Waldo Emerson

William Morrow) began by describing George Washington's mother as "a very human, cantankerous old lady" who "smoked a pipe incessantly" and "dragged his pride into the dust by seeking a pension during his lifetime, by wheedlings and borrowings and complaints among the neighbors." Hughes hated Washington's first biographer, "a canting sentimentalist, Parson Weems," and stressed that Washington was not "a man of piety." Chapter XXVIII ended with this characteristic passage:

But George Washington had left old England to her own devices. He was bent upon saving himself first. He was deep in debt. He was betrothed to a woman of great wealth. He was going to marry and settle down to the making of money. Which, after all, is one of the most important duties of any patriot.

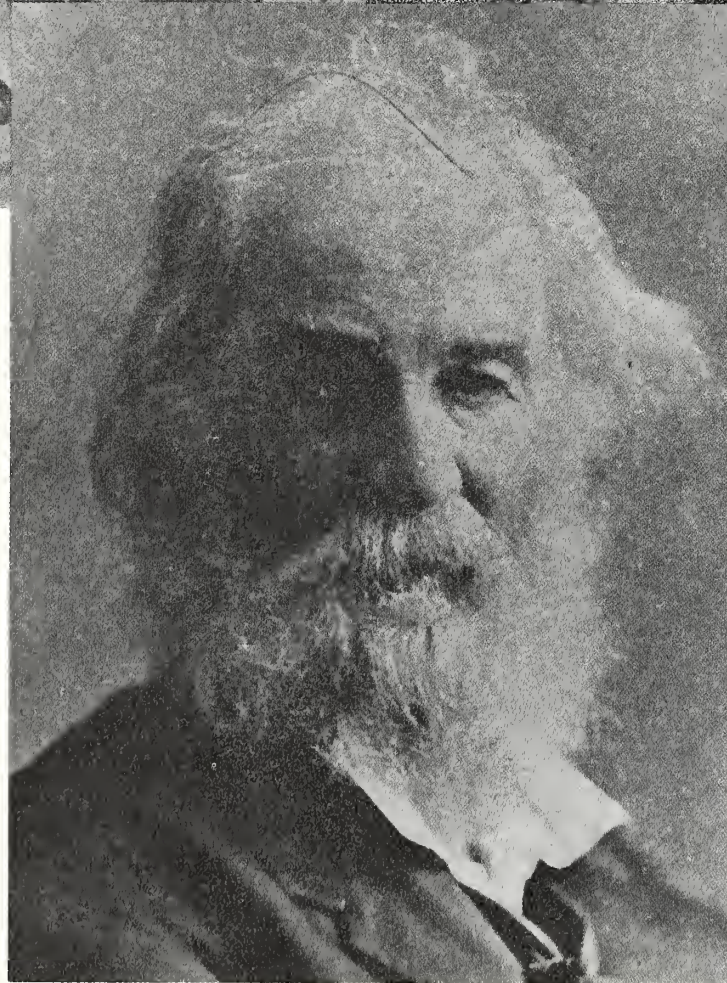
Masters wrote in the same debunking spirit.

Inspired in part by the success of Albert Beveridge's *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*

Thomas Jefferson

(1928), Masters argued that "As no new fact of moment about Lincoln can now be brought to light, the time has arrived when his apotheosis can be touched with the hand of rational analysis." Masters's debunking spirit was especially informed by the anti-war spirit which pervaded intellectual circles in America after World War I. Heroic reputations and wars went hand in hand. "War," Masters wrote, "makes brutes of those who practice it, and cowards and sycophants of those who have to endure it against their will; and when thinking is cowed and judgment is shackled, great reputations can be built both by stifling criticism and by artficing the facts."

The portrait of Lincoln that Masters drew was savage. The Rail-splitter was "profoundly ashamed of the poverty of his youth" and, therefore, married for money and leagued himself politically with the privileged classes in the Whig party. Though "mannerless" and "unkempt," Lincoln was no back-slapping common man. He was "cold," and



Walt Whitman

From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURES 2, 3, 4. Masters thought that Lincoln's fame unfairly overshadowed the fame of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Jefferson, and Walt Whitman. Lincoln himself thought Jefferson "the most distinguished politician of our history." Emerson thought Lincoln was "the true representative of this continent." Whitman believed that Lincoln was "the grandest figure yet, on all the crowded canvas of the Nineteenth Century." They would not have complained about the distribution of fame as Masters did.

no one called him "Abe." He was also calculating; there simply "was no time when he was not thinking of his career." His mind was "lazy." He never studied and as a result knew little of the history of his country and its institutions. He was a "slick" and "crafty" politician.

Masters relied on Beveridge's recent biography and William H. Herndon's older one for the details to support this hostile portrait of Lincoln's personality. But Herndon and Beveridge wrote little or nothing about Lincoln's Presidency. For his appraisal of that part of Lincoln's life, Masters relied on his own political prejudices. He dedicated the book "*To the Memory of THOMAS JEFFERSON THE PREEMINENT PHILOSOPHER — STATESMAN OF THE UNITED STATES, AND THEIR GREATEST PRESIDENT; WHOSE UNIVERSAL GENIUS THROUGH A LONG LIFE WAS DEVOTED TO THE PEACE, ENLIGHTENMENT AND LIBERTY OF THE UNION CREATED BY THE CONSTITUTION OF 1787.*" Lincoln "was a Hamiltonian always, though his awkwardness and poverty, and somewhat gregarious nature and democratic words seemed to mark him as the son of Jefferson." He centralized power.

Lincoln, Masters argued, could and should have avoided the Civil War. Instead, he ordered the invasion of the South. He was a conqueror. He obliterated states' rights and with them the true republic. In this crusade Lincoln wedded religious cant to centralizing politics ("Hebraic Puritanism," Masters called it) and ushered in the forces of industrial plutocracy, prohibition, and political corruption.

Even for an age used to debunking, Masters went too far. Rupert Hughes had been more circumspect. "As a god," he said, "Washington was a woeful failure; as a man he was tremendous." Masters did not give Lincoln any praise except to say that he had a sense of humor. The result was a howl of indignation all across America. School teachers, Boston booksellers, preachers, and Lincoln admirers denounced the book in dozens of letters to the editor, articles, and sermons. Charles E. Tracewell put it very succinctly in the *Washington Star*: "He overdid it."

Reactions to the book ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous. Lewis Gannett in the New York *Herald Tribune* confessed "to a total disbelief in heroes and a profound conviction of the high virtue of debunking. The conventional mythology according to which all great men were born great and never stole cherries or told fibs encourages small boys to feel guilty if they are not prigs. It is a loathsome philosophy." He quarreled with Masters not because he debunked but because he rebunked. It was "sheer poetry" and "heroic moralizing" but all for the other side. "Mr. Masters too has a spotless hero," Gannett said, "Stephen A. Douglas, and his hordes of angels are the soldiers of the Confederacy." The *Oneida* (New York) *Dispatch* said that "Masters' arguments fall of their own weight, inasmuch as his only declaration in Lincoln's favor is that 'he had a sense of humor.'" Yale's William Lyon Phelps was disgusted. "Never in history," he said, "has literature been so consistently filthy and rotten as today . . . it is getting so a good man is afraid to die." Representative Joe Crail of California, who had not read the book, called it "obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy and indecent" and introduced a bill in Congress to ban its circulation through the mail. And the custodian of the Lincoln tomb declared: "I have 300 pictures of Lincoln, taken at various ages after he was 5 years of age, showing him in many poses, and not one even hints that he was 'unkempt.' . . . His clothes were neat, his hair well combed and his features pleasant."

Richard F. Fuller, treasurer of the Board of Trade of Boston Book Merchants and a prominent member of the American Booksellers' Association, wrote a letter to the *Boston Herald* stating that he was glad that *Lincoln: The Man* was not selling well. The *Boston* newspaper speculated that "the craze for biography" was ebbing, but Masters's publisher reported no disappointment with sales in New York. William L. Nevin, president of New York's John Wanamaker department store, refused to place the book on sale. Wanamaker's Philadelphia store did the same.

Masters had a fine reputation as a man of letters, especially as a poet, and Samuel B. Howe of the South Side High School in Newark, New Jersey, found it beyond his "powers of belief that a man like Masters could say the things he is quoted as saying." It was not an angry young man's book. Masters was over sixty when he wrote it, and this fact invited speculation about his motive. Famed Lincoln collector Oliver R. Barrett of Chicago said that Masters "glimpsed over the top of mediocrity" with his *Spoon River Anthology*, "but from the infection of that fatal praise he became too fearless, too painfully

analytical, and too willing to warm over and serve up his earlier successes. His popularity waned, the public turned to newer lights, and now his 'Abraham Lincoln, the Man' appears — a volume of protest." He noted also that Masters called Jefferson, Whitman, and Emerson the greatest Americans from whose fame "the praise that has been bestowed on Lincoln is a robbery." Jefferson was long dead by the time of Lincoln's Presidency, of course, but Emerson and Whitman both praised Lincoln. Officials of the National Lincoln League referred simply to the author's "commercialized baseless."

Thoughtful reviewers ranged widely in their assessments of the book. A writer for the *Hugo* (Oklahoma) *News* read the *New York Times Magazine* review of *Lincoln: The Man* and complimented it:

It was wisely observed by the . . . reviewer that Masters' work is no Confederate biography — that it is a copperhead biography — that it is such a book as a Knight of the Golden Circle would have written. For it is personal. It is spiteful. It is hateful. It is mean. A Confederate writer probably would criticize the principles and policies of the war president, but he certainly would eulogize the kindly personality and charitable spirit of Lincoln. And it may be observed that in no other section of the country is the Lincoln name attaining such stature right now as it is attaining at the south. The revelatory works of Claude Bowers and Striker and George Fort Milton are teaching southerners how terrible a loss they suffered when Lincoln was killed and his peace-making policies were repudiated by political radicals. Most southerners now believe that if Lincoln had lived, he would have been more successful than Andrew Johnson in his efforts to prevent the onrush of the reconstruction terror.

This astute writer put his finger on a principal reason why Masters found almost no allies at all in his attack on Lincoln. Several editorials from former Confederate states, though they showed no special interest in defending Lincoln, did link him with Andrew Johnson and the (then) new view that Johnson tried to follow Lincoln's mild Reconstruction policies and to fend off a Radical Republican conspiracy to rape the South. The reviewer's assessment of opinion in the South was accurate. Times had changed since 1865.

Few wasted any kind words on Masters's effort. Professional cynic H. L. Mencken, whose review in the *New York Herald Tribune* was widely quoted and attacked, praised the book. Mencken agreed that "Lincoln turned his back on the Jacksonian tradition and allowed himself to be carried out by the tide that was eventually to wash away the old Republic altogether and leave in its place a plutocratic oligarchy hard to distinguish from the Roman." Lincoln's "most memorable feat," Mencken wrote, "was his appointment of the Lord God Jehova to the honorary chairmanship of the Republican National Committee." The Bill of Rights, Mencken added, "has never recovered" from Lincoln's repressive administration.

Claude Bowers, newspaperman-turned-historian and an active Democrat, called the book "intensely interesting" and "challenging." Harry Elmer Barnes thought the book might "compel the devotees of the Lincoln cult to listen to reason, something which they have not done in our generation." Barnes had argued "at the very progressive Twentieth Century Club in Boston" that Lincoln was unpopular in his own day; Barnes only "narrowly escaped physical assault at the hands of an Anglican Bishop who was present." Masters "rendered a genuine constructive service" by establishing "the precedent for fearless investigation of the career of the Great Emancipator." The *Syracuse* (New York) *Standard* interviewed faculty members at the local university, one of whom, history professor Edwin P. Tanner, also thought "Masters . . . rendered us a real service." Historian H. G. Eckenrode praised the book as "an exceedingly powerful and convincing work."

Most thoughtful critics — like Louis A. Warren in *Lincoln Lore*; Paul Angle, then the Secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association; and historian Claude M. Fuess — dismissed the book because it was less a history than an indictment. Masters had been a lawyer as well as a poet, and he argued a case against Lincoln as though he were fighting for a client's life. Fuess noted the excesses of Masters's language. The principles of the Whig party "were plunder and nothing else." The Republican party was "conceived in hatred and mothered in hatred, and went forth from a diseased womb without a name." Lincoln's record in Congress was "a tracing of his wavering mind, his incoherent thinking." He was "an under-sexed man." His nomination at Chicago was the result of

"brutality and cunning." His attitude toward the South was one "of hidden and deep malignancy." Warren noted that the author was consumed by three passions. He hated the Christian religion; he hated "modern Americanism, and especially the political party now in power [Republicans]"; and he hated most American heroes. Angle noted the paradoxes of Masters's hatreds:

An advocate of slavery as a social system, he criticizes Lincoln for not opposing its existence in the South. An opponent of capitalism, he lauds Douglas as a statesman of the industrial era. A scathing critic of those who would pass moral judgments, there is hardly a page in his book on which he has failed to condemn or justify.

Lincoln: The Man, then, was a personal book, more interesting for what it revealed about Masters than for what it said about Lincoln. Reporters in New York City were able to interview the author, and the newspaper reports of these interviews were revealing. Earl Sparling of the *New York Telegram* described Masters as sitting in the office of his publisher, "his mouth a grim, austere slit, only his battered hat to show him a poet." The poet said that "we have a Christian republic; no slavery, no polygamy, no saloons; only monopolists, bureaucrats, corrupt courts, imbecile Senators obeying Wall Street, fanatics, clergymen." The Emancipation Proclamation, calculated to make Lincoln famous, was "in the direction of inspiring Negroes to rise and kill the white people." To a *New York Times* reporter, Masters protested that he was "not an iconoclast." A reporter for the *Herald Tribune* visited Masters in his home on West Twenty-Third Street. If Lincoln had let the states go in peace, Masters told the reporter, "They would have come back into the Union in less than five years. Economic necessity would have forced them back."

Nearly fifty years later, what can be said about Edgar Lee Masters and the controversy over *Lincoln: The Man*? First, though he railed against Wall Street, monopoly, and war, Masters's radicalism was largely cultural rather than political. Masters said that he hated prohibition "worse than anything since abolition." He was still fighting the small-town Republican prohibitionists his father fought back in Lewistown. His political and social criticism was neither profound nor well thought out. It had a veneer of sophistication because of his penchant for constitutional debate, a heritage of his legal background. Though critics dwelled on his Democratic affiliation, his denunciation of Lincoln's centralizing power would not endear him to the Democratic party of the 1930s.

Second, Masters's values boiled down to a peculiar nostalgia for the small-town America against which he first rebelled in the *Spoon River Anthology*. He believed in a "storybook democracy," to borrow a phrase from another contemporary novelist and social critic, John Dos Passos. Much of the content of this nostalgia was essentially racist. One suspects that the Civil War seemed hardly worth fighting to him because he could not see any wisdom in shedding white men's blood for the sake of slaves. He wrote a poem entitled "The Great Race Passes," which borrowed its key phrase from Madison Grant's famous racist book, *The Passing of the Great Race*. He loathed immigrants, felt that Civil War casualties had depleted the racial stock of America's "better days," and was antisemitic. Masters hated "Hebraic Puritanism" in part because he saw Christianity as perpetuating some of the religious ideas of Judaism. He once blamed the Civil War on a Jewish lust for money. He thought that Jews had spoiled the poetic talent of Vachel Lindsay; Jewish critics in New York shaped American opinion of poetry written in Chicago.

Third, Masters altogether misjudged the spirit of his age. When *Lincoln: The Man* appeared, critic after critic immediately labeled it as just another debunking book in the Rupert Hughes tradition. Instead of riding the crest of a wave, Masters in fact sank in a sea of predictable cynicism. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* placed the book in the "new school of biography in this country" and attacked the evolution of this school:

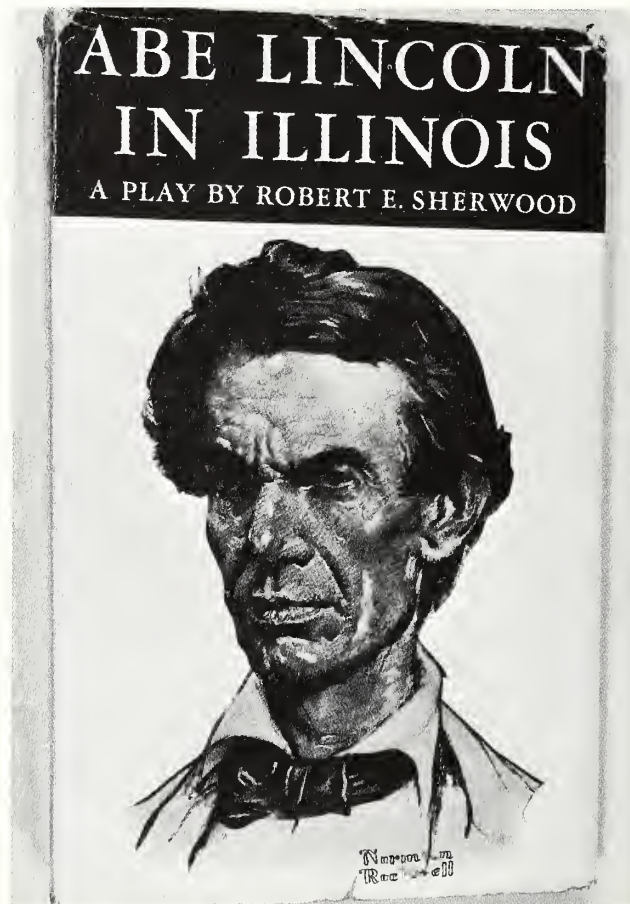
The original series of "real" biographies which were given to the public many years ago were entertaining and valuable because they made an honest attempt to depict notable men and women as they actually existed. But in these jazz days biographers are not content with giving distorted pictures of their subjects; they also take joy in attacking their motives.

More than one reviewer had ready at hand this anecdote to scotch the debunking spirit:

Two or three years ago another American writer made a speech about George Washington in which he said things resented by the people, who revered the memory of the Father of His Country. The day after the speech was made the Washington correspondents asked President Coolidge what he thought about the things that had been said.

Coolidge turned, looked out of the window toward the towering Washington monument, and said: "I notice it is still up there."

Masters's book was the last gasp of the debunking spirit in America between the wars. The popular Lincoln books and plays of the Depression era praised Lincoln. Robert Sherwood's play, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, and Carl Sandburg's mammoth biography are the obvious examples. Predictions that Masters's "Copperhead" biography would not put a dent in Lincoln's reputation proved true. The book is largely forgotten. Stephen Oates, whose recent biography (*With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln*) stresses that no one called Lincoln "Abe," does not mention Masters's book. Even Masters himself by 1944 could write an article on "Abe Lincoln's New Salem" which called "Lincoln's career . . . more magical, more dramatic, than Washington's or Jackson's." He wrote the article for a magazine he would surely have shunned in 1931, *The Rotarian*!



From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 5. Robert E. Sherwood's play, published as a book in 1939, won a Pulitzer Prize and launched Raymond Massey's career as a portrayer of Lincoln on stage and screen. The illustration on the dust jacket resembles Massey more than Lincoln and shows how much the success of the play depended on the actor in Lincoln's role. The legalistic and pro-Southern Masters surely disliked Lincoln's speech in the play in which he denounced the Supreme Court as an institution "composed of mortal men, most of whom . . . come from the privileged class in the South."

Ny Daily News 1/18/85

30

Goetz, in light of Jefferson and Lincoln

WASHINGTON — Bernhard Goetz has been adulated and deplored, glorified and denounced, psychoanalyzed at long range by quack psychologists and exploited for a variety of commercial purposes.

In truth, he is neither a criminal nor a hero. What he did was neither right nor wrong. It was inevitable.

Thomas Jefferson explained Goetz in the Declaration of Independence: "... Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all Experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

"But when a long Train of Abuses and Usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a Design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide New Guards for their future Security."

The people of New York have long suffered their daily Evils in silence. The IRT, the BMT and the IND might well be renamed the TAU — the Trains of Abuses and Usurpations. And New Yorkers live under the absolute Despotism of the criminal justice system.

It is an absolute despotism because there is nothing a citizen can do to change it. You cannot cast a vote for any local, state or federal official, you cannot elect any judge, you cannot pay for more policemen or prisons and hope to have the slightest effect on a criminal-justice system that has become a world unto itself.

The crooks will still walk free because of a faultily obtained confession, or a lawyer who wasn't called or an "unreasonable" search or any one of a thousand technicalities that have become ingrained into the legal system through court precedent and that are untouchable by the citizenry or their elected representatives. The courts are above politics and beyond the law.

They allow robbers to go on probation, they let killers serve two years, they sentence vicious murderers to "life" and let them out in six years. And there is nothing you can do about it — no vote, no tax, no petition to politicians, nothing. That is despotism. For all the influence you have on your daily life, you might as well live in Albania.

The Goetz case transcends whether his four alleged assailants threatened

him with a crime. Arguments about whether their screwdrivers were sharpened or unsharpened, brandished or concealed, are beside the point. Goetz was subjected to the sort of everyday

harassment that one is supposed to accept meekly, in silence, as the price of living in the city — and he balked.

Most people are prepared to live with the risk of armed robbery — even murder. Crime happens everywhere. But Goetz has shown that people are not prepared to live as constant cringers before daily, petty, bullying assaults by rowdies, toughs, skylarking hoodlums — who when caught say innocently, "We were just fooling, man. We didn't mean to hurt the guy."

That Evil is insufferable, to paraphrase Jefferson. That is the Evil that destroys the fabric of civilization. It is not the occasional murder; it is the constant assault on sensibilities, on your eyes and your ears and your fears as you try to go about your daily life. It is the constant threat that murder may happen, and if it does not much will be done about it.

If Goetz had shot youths attempting to murder him, he would have been a

momentary celebrity. What has made him a hero is that he shot four insufferable thugs attempting a routine petty ripoff — the kind the cops and courts laugh at.

In his first inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln said, "This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it or their revolutionary right to dismember and overthrow it."

THE PUBLIC SUPPORT for Goetz shows that, when it comes to the quality of their daily lives, New Yorkers indeed have grown weary of the existing government. They have no real constitutional right to amend the criminal justice system. What remained to them was an act of revolution. This is what Goetz committed — and a plurality supports him. This is why the politicians, most of them lawyers, are so scared: their cozy system is in danger of being dismembered and overthrown.

The first shot fired at Lexington and Concord, opening the American Revolution, was called the "shot heard 'round the world." Who fired it? It doesn't matter. Somebody did. Somebody had to.



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NICHOLAS LEMANN ON SCHOOL REFORM / MISMANAGING BASIC SCIENCE

· W H A T · JEFFERSON AND LINCOLN — R E A D —



AN
ESSAY ON
LITERACY AND
ACHIEVEMENT

· B Y ·

DOUGLAS L. WILSON





For both men books and the written word mattered deeply, and were essential to their greatness—but in substantially different ways. A reflection on the meanings of literacy

WHAT JEFFERSON AND LINCOLN READ

BY DOUGLAS L. WILSON



"AN INCESSANT AND OMNIVOROUS READER": SPECTACLES OF JEFFERSON'S DESIGN AT MONTICELLO

ALITTLE-NOTICED ACCOUNT OF HOW ABRAHAM Lincoln rose from obscurity to political greatness calls attention to the term he spent as a congressman in Washington during the 1840s. In a lecture delivered during the Lincoln centennial, in 1909, Hubert Skinner proposed that it was there that Lincoln laid the basis for his later political triumphs by taking advantage of the resources of the Library of Congress to study the great documents and issues of American history. "In Washington," according to Skinner, "Mr. Lincoln had been a puzzle, and a subject of amusement to his fellows. He did not drink, or use to-

bacco, or bet, or swear. It would seem that he must be a very rigid churchman. But no, he did not belong to any church; and he soon became reckoned an 'unbeliever.' How did he occupy his spare time? He was mousing among the books of the old Congressional Library. . . . 'Bah!' said his fellow Congressmen, 'He is a book-worm!'"

Skinner's depiction of Lincoln is undocumented, nor can it be confirmed from what little is known of Lincoln's activities in Washington from December of 1847 to March of 1849. But there is no reason to doubt that he frequented the congressional library, which was directly

across the street from where he lived, and every reason to believe that he found it inviting. Housed in the Capitol in what some regarded as the most beautiful suite of rooms in the city, the Library of Congress was a popular Capitol Hill meeting place, and for a sociable young congressman living most of the time alone in a boarding house, this aspect of the library must have been very appealing. For the research that went into his congressional speeches, the library's resources were clearly indispensable.

One of the things about the congressional library that would have interested Lincoln and that might have prompted him to "mouse" in it more than other congressmen was that a large number of its books had once belonged to one of his earliest heroes—Thomas Jefferson. When British troops burned the Capitol, in 1814, and destroyed the congressional library, Jefferson promptly offered his own magnificent collection as a replacement. The acquisition of Jefferson's 6,700 volumes made for a collection more than double the size of the previous one. Another, more consequential, result was that it dramatically broadened the scope of the Library of Congress and gave rise to the notion that it ought to become a national library.

In Lincoln's day, and until the end of the century, the books were still arranged according to Jefferson's distinctive and ingenious classification system, which was prominently displayed at the beginning of the printed catalogue in use at the time, and the titles therein were still listed in Jefferson's format. In perusing the catalogue Lincoln could easily identify the many books that had once belonged to Jefferson, for they were plainly marked, as explained by a note on the first page: "The Works to which the letter J. is prefixed, were in the Library of the late President Jefferson, when it was purchased by Congress in 1815." In his first year in Congress, Lincoln had an opportunity to vote for the purchase of Jefferson's papers, and if, in researching his speeches, Lincoln carried home Library of Congress books, as he did books from the library of the Supreme Court, in a large bandanna suspended from a stick, some of the books in that bandanna may have once belonged to Thomas Jefferson.



**LINCOLN'S
COMMITMENT TO
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A SPECIES OF
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SELF-KNOWLEDGE.**

EXAMPLES OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S EARLY READING, AT THE
LINCOLN BOYHOOD NATIONAL MEMORIAL, IN INDIANA



WILLIAM STRODE

THOMAS JEFFERSON AND ABRAHAM LINCOLN WERE as different as the centuries that fostered them, but the virtue of comparisons is that they tend to throw into relief qualities and characteristics that might otherwise be minimized or escape notice. Books and learning, which constitute the focus of this brief comparison, were important in the lives of both men, and they often figure as important elements in the legends about both, which in some respects are as noteworthy as their lives. In characterizing the transformation of the Lincoln of legend—"Honest Abe becomes Father Abraham; the rail splitter becomes the Savior of the Union; the most comic of our major figures becomes the supremely tragic figure"—the great Jefferson biographer Dumas Malone confessed, "By comparison the Jefferson legend seems rather pale, and one wonders if it can be properly called a legend in the same sense." But the legends are still building. President John F. Kennedy's remark to an assembly of Nobel laureates—that never had so much accumulated knowledge been present in the White House, with the possible exception of when Jefferson dined there alone—has gained enormous currency and is now irrevocably part of the Jefferson legend.

As one would expect, the formative years of Jefferson and Lincoln represent a study in contrasts, for the two men began life at opposite ends of the social and economic spectrum. There are, however, some intriguing parallels. Both men suffered the devastating loss of a parent at an early age. Jefferson's father, an able and active man to whom his son was deeply devoted, died when his son was fourteen, and Thomas was left to the care of his mother. His adolescent misogyny and his subsequent glacial silence on the subject of his mother strongly suggest that their relationship was strained. Conversely, Lincoln suffered the loss of his mother at the age of nine, and while he adored his father's second wife, he seems to have grown increasingly unable to regard his father with affection or perhaps even respect. Both Jefferson and Lincoln had the painful misfortune to experience in their youth the death of a favorite sister. And both were marked for distinction early by being elected to their respective legislatures at the age of twenty-five.

But the differences are great. Jefferson was born into the Virginia gentry. Along with a privileged position in society, he inherited a small fortune in land and slaves. The poverty and obscurity into which Lincoln was born, on the other hand, were nearly complete. His father owned land but had great difficulty holding on to it and finally retreated with his family to southwestern Indiana, which in 1816 was little more than a wilderness, and where Abraham grew up having only the homemade clothes on his back.

In the matter of education the contrasts are equally great. Jefferson received a superb education, even by the standards of his class. It included formal schooling from the age of five, expert instruction in classical languages,

two years of college, and a legal apprenticeship. Along the way he had the benefit of conspicuously learned men as his teachers—the Reverend James Maury, Dr. William Small, and George Wythe—in addition to a seat at the table of the cultivated governor of Virginia, Francis Fauquier. Lincoln had almost no formal education. Growing up with nearly illiterate parents and in an atmosphere that had, as he wrote, "nothing to excite ambition for education," Lincoln was essentially self-taught. The backwoods schools he attended very sporadically were conducted by teachers with meager qualifications. "If a straggler supposed to understand latin, happened to sojourn in the neighborhood," Lincoln wrote, "he was looked upon as a wizzard." Jefferson read Latin from an early age and, after mastering classical languages and French, was able to teach himself Italian; Lincoln at about the same age was teaching himself grammar in order to be able to speak and write standard English.

However different in their educational opportunities, both Jefferson and Lincoln as young men became known to their contemporaries as "hard students." Jefferson was remembered as always preparing his lessons before joining in the games of his schoolmates and as carrying his Greek grammar with him wherever he went. He is reputed to have studied fifteen hours a day at college, and his classmate John Page said that Jefferson could "tear himself away from his dearest friends, to fly to his studies." Upon deciding to practice law, he studied for nearly three years before taking his bar examination (others might spend only a few months) and then put in an additional year of study, making extensive extracts from law reports and legal treatises before taking his first case. Jefferson also followed this eighteenth-century practice of "commonplacing"—which resulted in an accumulation of extracts, called a commonplace book—in his literary and philosophical reading.

Lincoln was remembered by those he grew up with as an exceptionally studious boy who "read everything he could get his hands on." His family testified that in his adolescent years he was constantly reading and making notes on what he read, even when he had no paper and had to write on boards. His stepmother recalled that he would wrestle tenaciously with words, passages, and ideas he didn't understand. When he went out on his own, his absorption in his studies was a source of astonishment to his neighbors at New Salem, where, in addition to studying history and biography, he immersed himself in technical books on grammar, surveying, and the law. His legal studies grew so intensive that his friends feared for his health, and when he became temporarily deranged after the death of Ann Rutledge, whom he probably would have married, some thought the cause must be excessive application to his studies.

A comparison of the earliest reading of Jefferson and Lincoln is instructive. The legend in Jefferson's family is that he had read all the books in his father's library by the

time he was five. The inventory of that library which was made nine years later, when Peter Jefferson died, shows about two dozen titles, consisting of a Bible, a dictionary, and books on Virginia law, with an admixture of political and literary standards, such as Rapin's *History of England* and *The Spectator*. The earliest entries in the literary commonplace book the young Jefferson kept are Latin excerpts from Horace, Virgil, Cicero, and Ovid. These and excerpts from Pope, Milton, and Shakespeare date from his teens and suggest that he was being introduced systematically to the standard classical and English writers.

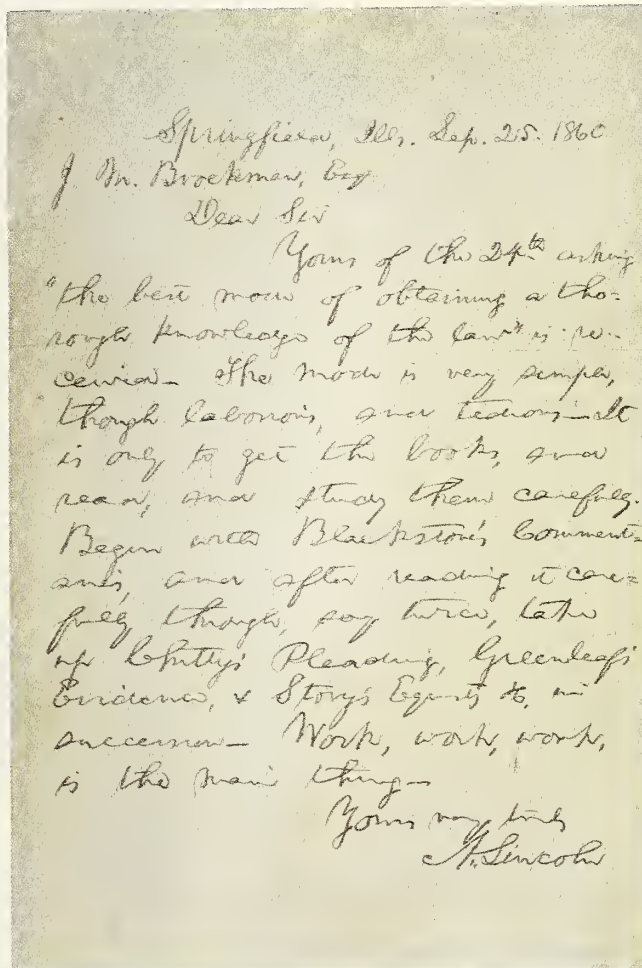
Lincoln's first book was undoubtedly the Bible, one of the very few books in the Lincoln home. Apart from the school books to which he was introduced, such as *Dilworth's Spelling-Book*, Lincoln's earliest reading was largely confined to what he could borrow from his neighbors. Like Jefferson, he kept a notebook of his early readings, but unfortunately it has not survived. His Indiana acquaintances agreed that he read and re-read all the books he could get hold of, which, given the primitive character of the neighborhood, were not many. They seem to have included Aesop's *Fables*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, James Riley's *Narrative*, a life of Franklin, and lives of Washington by Mason Weems and David Ramsay. The early reading of Jefferson and Lincoln reflects the differences in

their circumstances and may provide clues to the incipient genius of each. But what is perhaps most striking is that as boys and young men, both seized all available opportunities for reading.

JEFFERSON AND LINCOLN MUST BE JUDGED EQUAL IN the dedication and effort they brought to their youthful studies. They appear to have been equally disciplined and equally determined to achieve their objectives through reading and study, but those objectives were markedly different. Jefferson set out to become a learned man. From an early age he aspired to the eighteenth-century ideal of the *philosophe*, the universally informed philosopher, whose knowledge was built on a classical base and whose efforts were committed to reason and the pursuit of objective truth. Jefferson's intellectual endeavors were a source of personal pleasure, and although he felt obligated to steer them in a useful direction, they clearly yielded satisfaction as ends in themselves. He often said that he was ill-suited by nature for politics and would have followed a life of study but for the accident of the times he lived in.

Lincoln must have been motivated in part by an intelligent backwoods boy's curiosity about the great world beyond, but his consuming ambition was to rise. The poverty into which he was born entailed a life of manual labor, the unremitting regimen of the ax and the plow. Lincoln's commitment to study, which his neighbors and perhaps even his father saw as a species of laziness, may be regarded instead as a manifestation of self-knowledge. Even as a boy he recognized and began to indulge his differentness, and by the time he was a young man his distinctive ways had set him apart. The character that Skinner says was remarked by his fellow congressmen twenty years later—his abstinence from liquor, tobacco, and profanity—was already in evidence in his youth, and if it was unusual for a politician in Washington, it was almost unheard of on the mid-western frontier.

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A LETTER OF ADVICE FROM LINCOLN THE LAWYER

The young Lincoln became an avid reader of newspapers as well as books. His stepmother remembered that in the period from 1827 to 1830 he was "a constant reader of them," and these highly partisan sheets no doubt sharpened his interest in politics. One of his friends in Indiana remembered that this was about the time he broke rank with most of his friends and neighbors and proclaimed himself an anti-Jackson man. Another remembered lending Lincoln a newspaper containing an editorial on Thomas Jefferson, which Lincoln could later repeat word for word. Thus Louis A. Warren's suggestion that the editorial may date from the time of Jefferson's

death, on the Fourth of July, 1826, takes on added interest, for Lincoln insisted repeatedly in later life that his politics derived from the Declaration of Independence.

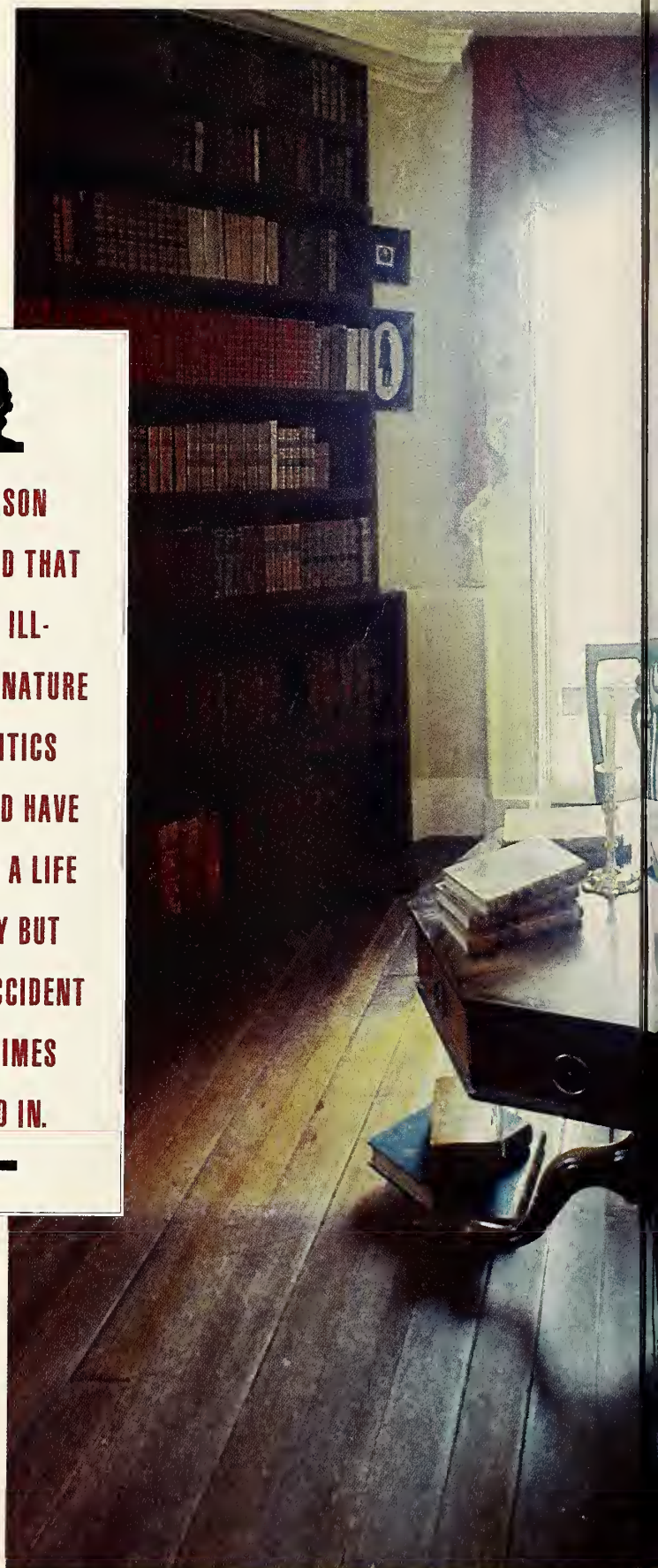
But Lincoln's legendary feats of reading, book-borrowing, and diligent study belonged only to his youth and early manhood. Once established as a successful legislator and licensed to practice law, Lincoln put his days as a hard student behind him. Thereafter he seems to have done little more in the way of serious reading than his professional and political interests required. His law partner, William H. Herndon, who was himself an avid reader with a good library, said emphatically that Lincoln read little. Philosophical and reflective as he undoubtedly was, the mature Lincoln contented himself with newspapers and brief forays into Herndon's scientific and philosophical books, rarely reading one all the way through. Lincoln "read less and thought more than any man in his sphere in America," was the way Herndon phrased it. "No man can put his finger on any great book written in the last or present century that Lincoln ever read."

He could still set himself to a particular task that required disciplined reading, as when he undertook to master the six books of Euclid. Robert Lincoln remembered his father's studious attention to Euclid, as did some fellow lawyers on the circuit, and Lincoln himself was sufficiently proud of this achievement to point it out in an autobiographical statement. He still relished poetry, which had early been a favorite recreation. It seemed to some of his friends that he could recite all of Burns by heart, and his marked fondness for recitation may indicate that he preferred this to private reading. In fact, much to the annoyance of his law partner, Lincoln did his office reading aloud, claiming that both hearing and seeing the words reinforced his grasp of the material. If there was an exception to his lapse from intensive study in his maturity, it was Shakespeare. "When he was young he read the Bible," Herndon said, "and when of age he read Shakespeare. This latter book was scarcely ever out of his mind and his hands."

Jefferson, in contrast, remained a hard student all his life. What became legendary with him was the incredible range and depth of his knowledge, something that impressed not only his friends and fellow Americans



**JEFFERSON
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FOR THE ACCIDENT
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HE LIVED IN.**



THOMAS JEFFERSON'S LIBRARY AT MONTICELLO, WHOSE VOLUMES FORMED THE BASIS OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



ROBERT LEVELLYN

but sophisticated Europeans as well. As one might expect, nearly all of Jefferson's great learning was gleaned through diligent reading and study. He believed there was no substitute for research, no matter how tedious. "A patient pursuit of facts, and cautious combination and comparison of them," he wrote in a footnote to *Notes on Virginia*, "is the drudgery to which man is subjected by his Maker, if he wishes to attain sure knowledge." Books were the indispensable tools of his work, whether as lawyer, architect, farmer, legislator, or revolutionary statesman. Merely the books referred to and discussed in his famous correspondence with John Adams would establish Jefferson's credentials as an incessant and omnivorous reader, but his general correspondence and other writings present unmistakable evidence of a habitual recurrence to books. Isaac Jefferson, who grew up as a slave at Monticello, remembered his master in the characteristic act of poring over books spread out on the floor of his library and said that whenever someone asked him a question, "he go right straight to the book and tell you all about it."

Both Jefferson and Lincoln were lawyers, and both readied themselves for the law by a course of intensive reading and study. But once admitted to the bar, they diverged. When Jefferson's law books were destroyed by fire, in 1770, he wrote to his friends in despair, for he believed he could not represent his clients without books. And, indeed, his surviving opinions show frequent reference to the printed case law and other legal authorities and suggest that his great strength as a lawyer was his legal knowledge. Lincoln was not known for his legal scholarship but was unexcelled as an advocate in jury trials. In this context, it is interesting that, in legend, Lincoln is given credit for saving Duff Armstrong, the son of his old friends Jack and Hannah Armstrong, from a murder conviction by the shrewd use of a book—an almanac, which showed that certain testimony about the moonlight was questionable. But a close look at this case indicates that it was Lincoln's highly personal and strongly emotional appeal to the jurors, which reduced everyone in the courtroom to tears, rather than the impugning of the moonlight testimony, that carried the day. One is reminded here of Edmund Randolph's famous comparison of the legal talents of Jefferson and Patrick Henry: "Mr. Jefferson drew copiously from the depths of the law, Mr. Henry from the recesses of the human heart."

TELLING STORIES AND READING THE WORKS OF HUMORISTS to his Cabinet are part of the Lincoln legend, and yet one of the truly remarkable things about Lincoln as President is the extent to which he resorted to literature. Perhaps no President turned to English poetry while in office with the frequency that Lincoln did. He continued to recite his old favorites, such as "O Why Should the Spirit of Mortal Be Proud!" and Holmes's "The Last Leaf," their melancholy and brood-

ing concern for human mortality having been rendered especially apt by the somber circumstances of civil war. And he read the poems of Thomas Hood to invoke the lighter side. But he repeatedly returned to Shakespeare, whom he had probably first read as a boy in William Scott's *Lessons in Elocution* and for whom he had a lifelong fascination. He wrote the Shakespearean actor James Hackett, "Some of Shakespeare's plays I have never read; while others I have gone over perhaps as frequently as any unprofessional reader. Among the latter are Lear, Richard Third, Henry Eighth, Hamlet, and especially Macbeth. I think nothing equals Macbeth."

There is abundant evidence that in the most trying hours of his presidency Lincoln sought out Shakespeare's plays as a source of strength and consolation. Don E. Fehrenbacher relates this affinity for Shakespeare to Lincoln's keen sense of his role and ultimate responsibility in the carnage of the Civil War. "To some indeterminable extent and in some intuitive way, Lincoln seems to have assimilated the substance of the plays into his own experience and deepening sense of tragedy."

Jefferson, too, had been extremely fond of poetry in his youth, as his literary commonplace book and other evidence indicates. His poetic acquaintance was wide, though his tastes were fairly conventional. Like many sophisticated readers of his day, he was smitten by the works of Ossian, the putative third-century Celtic bard whose poems were actually the work of James Macpherson. One of the things that attracted Jefferson to Ossian

was the supposed similarity of his bardic offerings to the writings of Homer and Virgil, whom Jefferson also greatly admired. He was decidedly partial to the classics, including Horace, the great favorite of the Enlightenment. And like most readers of his time, Jefferson revered Shakespeare, whom he singled out as the English poet to be studied most diligently. His library contained, at one time or another, many different editions of Shakespeare, and he was quite familiar with the efforts of eighteenth-century editors who vied with one another to improve the reliability of the text.

But Jefferson's taste for poetry declined as he grew older. About the time he assumed the presidency, he confessed to a correspondent that his youthful relish for poetry had almost completely deserted him. Unlike Lincoln, he seems to have faced the problems of his presidency without resorting to literary works for perspective or inspiration. It would have been out of character for him to have read aloud, let alone to members of his Cabinet, and he probably allowed himself comparatively little time for purely personal reading. A notable exception was his discovery of John Baxter's history of England, which he embraced and recommended enthusiastically as an alternative to the "subversive" history of David Hume. Another exception was a purposeful excursion into the New Testament, his first effort to extract the "diamonds" of authentic Christianity from the corrupted text of the Gospels. This strictly private project may be the appropriate counterpart to Lincoln's reading Shakespeare aloud to his visitors, for it exemplifies Jefferson's characteristic retreat to his study and his need to concentrate his own "recreational" activities on what he would have called "useful objects."

THE CORE

It goes on burning in your son's brain
after the last war: standing
on guard in the desert at night
he'd watch a great blast of fire
he knew would destroy him. At sunset
the cliffs of Sinai open their veins.
The Red Sea closes over the chariots.
We think it will never end
all summer, his chain-smoking, jumpy
fingers during our visits in the ward.
There are redwoods in California
that feed for months on the heat
of their own destruction. You can see
where fires have guzzled their way
to the core, until the tree,
what's left of it, stands
gaping around its absence.

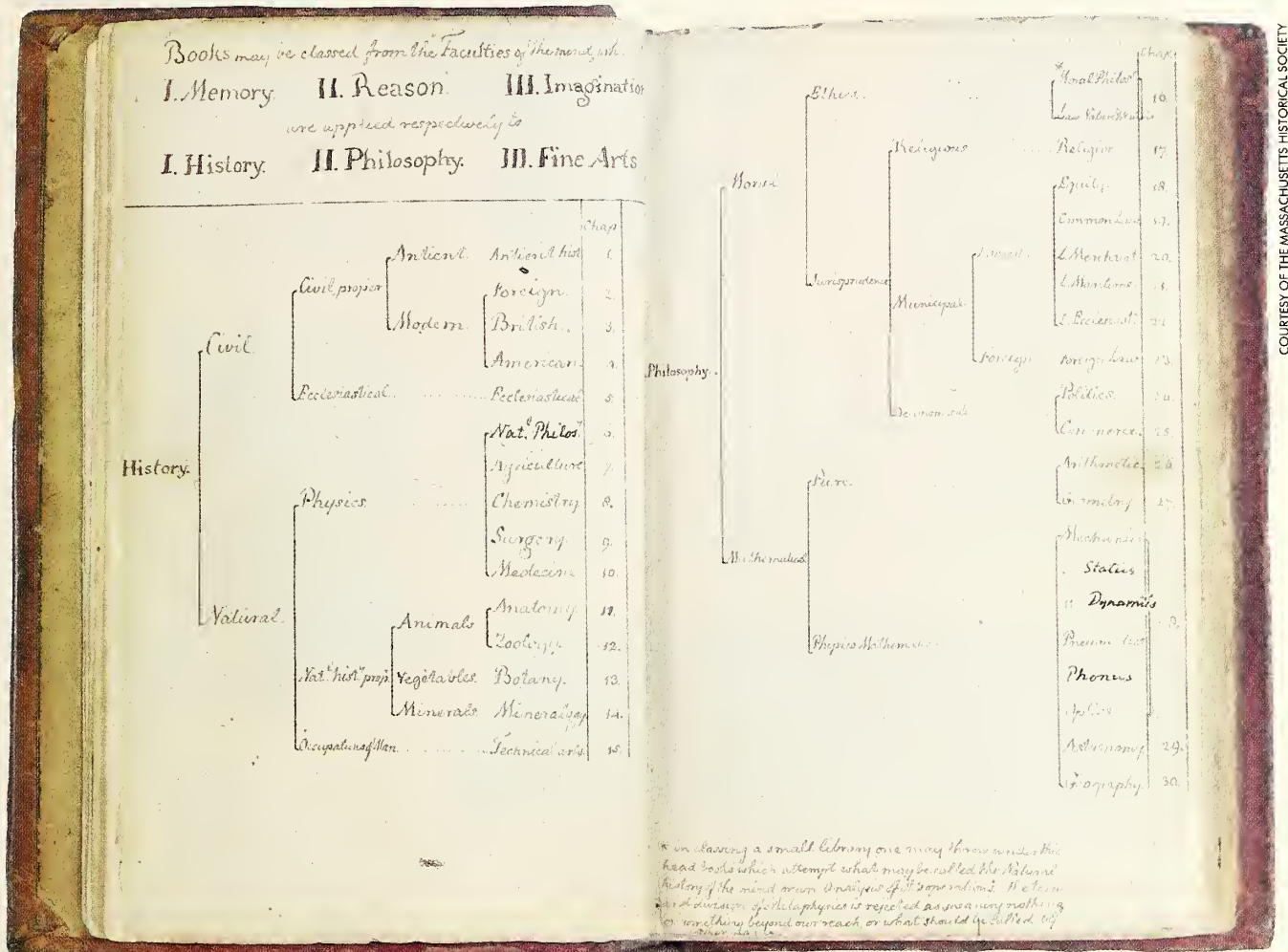
—Shirley Kaufman

NOWHERE IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JEFFERSON and Lincoln more dramatically demonstrated, or more characteristic, than in their personal libraries. Jefferson's famous library was his most cherished possession, on which he lavished vast amounts of time and money. Having started out in life as a reader and collector of books, Jefferson already owned a very sizable library at the age of twenty-six, when his mother's house burned and he lost most of his books. So determined was he to replace his library with a grander one that within three years he had acquired a collection three to four times as large. In the face of great difficulties during the revolutionary years, and though effectively cut off from the chief sources of books abroad, Jefferson managed steadily to build up his library. He recorded in 1783 that he possessed the resounding total of 2,640 volumes, but even then he was assembling a long list of books he hoped to acquire abroad. In fact, he collected so assiduously during his five years in France that he nearly doubled the size of his holdings. As a consequence, by the time of his retirement from the presidency, many years later, his library had grown to unprecedented proportions

and may well have been, as he believed it to be, "the choicest collection of books in the United States."

As a poor boy and later, as a young man heavily in debt, Lincoln owned little. But even when he could afford books, he rarely bothered to acquire them. Indeed, it is difficult to find a record of his buying a book. While at New Salem, upon being advised to study English grammar by Mentor Graham, he reportedly walked several miles to acquire a copy of Kirkham's grammar. But when he had mastered it, he apparently gave it away—to Ann Rutledge. To Herndon, who was a voracious reader and

LINCOLN WAS MARTYRED AT THE MOMENT OF HIS greatest achievement. Jefferson lived on for many years after his presidency. Ever active, though reclusive, he achieved much during those seventeen years, not the least of which was a lasting persona, as the Sage of Monticello. He had long anticipated his return to private life and to the blessings of the triad he often named—his family, his farm, and his books. In the first two of these he experienced bitter disappointments, as he found himself powerless to reconcile the quarreling and disaffected members of his family, and just as powerless to manage



THE CLASSIFICATION SCHEME IN THOMAS JEFFERSON'S "CATALOGUE OF LIBRARY" (1783)

an eager collector of books, it seemed that Lincoln had, "aside from his law books and the few gilded volumes that ornamented the centre-table in his parlor at home, comparatively no library." This may understate the case somewhat, for Robert Lincoln remembered that his father had some books at home. "I remember well a large bookcase full of them." But Herndon is probably justified in his conclusion that Lincoln "never seemed to care to own or collect books." Upon leaving Springfield for Washington and the presidency, he apparently gave most of the books he did own to Herndon.

his lands on a paying basis and extricate himself from an increasing burden of debt. But in his books he found solace and satisfaction, and he indulged himself during these years in what he described as "a canine appetite for reading." "I cannot live without books," he confessed to John Adams—and during the last eleven years of his life he assembled more than 2,000 carefully selected volumes to replace the collection he had sold to Congress.

Because Lincoln was a self-taught man, his biographers have made much of his reading. But as the author of the best study of the subject, David C. Mearns, has

noted, they have overdone it, for he could not possibly have "read, digested, absorbed all of the books imputed to him." If it would be hard to exaggerate the range and extent of Jefferson's prodigious reading, what is hard in Lincoln's case is to come to terms with the limitations of his learning while doing justice to the crucial role played by reading in his character and career. Without reading books he could never have risen from a life of manual labor. Without books he could never have developed the surpassing prose style that marked his most memorable utterances. And without books—particularly, one feels, without Burns and Shakespeare—he would never have developed the humane sensibility and deep regard for the complexities of experience that tempered his ambition and elevated him to greatness. But Lincoln was neither widely read nor deeply learned. He savored what he read and liked, retained it with a nearly photographic memory, and often referred to or recited favorite passages from his reading. But it was not a large body of material, and by comparison with what Jefferson had at his command, it was modest indeed.

Reading, as Robert Darn-ton has observed in another context, is more than the "straightforward process of lifting information from a page." It has the unique power to transform. In thinking about ways of gauging the role and importance of reading in the lives of these two men, one is reminded of Emily Dickinson's poem on the subject, which begins with one distinctive metaphor and ends with another.

There is no Frigate like a Book
To take us Lands away
Nor any Coursers like a Page
Of prancing Poetry—
This Travel may the poorest take
Without offence of Toll—
How frugal is the Chariot
That bears the Human soul.

The poem presents reading as a mode of transport, and the poet recognizes that it takes more than one form. A frigate is swift and wide-ranging; it is commodious and

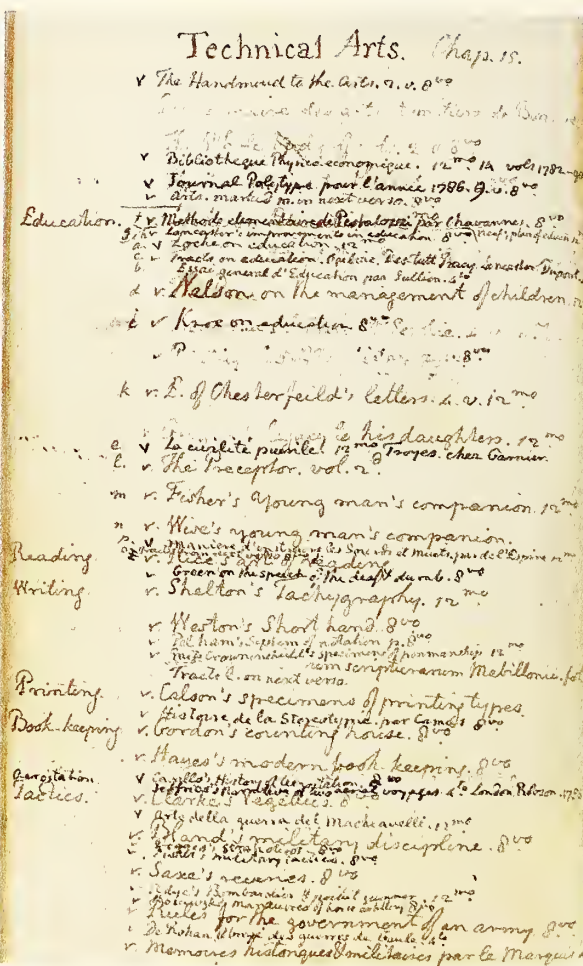
global in its reach. As an image, it embodies the potentiality that reading offers in its more expansive and elaborate forms. But traveling by frigate is beyond the means of most, whereas reading itself, the poem insists, is not. It is a venture in transport that the poorest may take "without offence of Toll." This prepares the reader for the poet's final reflection on reading, which is projected in the image of a simple, cartlike conveyance with overtones of grandeur—the chariot. Though sharply contrasting in its capacities with the ocean-conquering frigate, the chariot is nonetheless capable of performing the quintessential function of reading: it transports the human soul.

Jefferson's natural predilection for the studious life, his extensive personal library, and his knowledge of six languages afforded him extraordinary means for intellectual travel. Like Dickinson's frigate, his reading could thus take him to any port of call in the world of learning. Lincoln's reading might be likened to Dickinson's frugal chariot. The startling adjective "frugal" is the poet's way of emphasizing the utterly basic nature of the metaphorical mode of transport. Though beginning his life in penury, Lincoln was able early to avail himself of the benefits of reading "without offence of Toll." And though his career as a reader had distinct limitations, it accomplished something profound and essential to his greatness. It afforded him a mode—if not so grand and stately as the frigate of Thomas Jefferson, a mode nonetheless—of imaginative

transport, a means by which to engage the events of previous times, to experience the tragedies and triumphs of the world's great heroes.

Unlike many of the world's great political leaders, Jefferson and Lincoln shared a greatness of mind and imagination. We value them not only for what they did but for what they thought and said. The words and ideas that continue to challenge and inspire us are undoubtedly the ripened fruit of experience, but in the case of both men we do well to remember that it was an experience of which reading—whether the frigate or the frugal chariot—was an indispensable part. □

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ANOTHER PAGE FROM JEFFERSON'S 1783 "CATALOGUE"

Hubbard Says Lincoln Was Democrat

Springfield (AP)

The Senate approved bills yesterday which would make the birthday anniversary of Abraham Lincoln legal and school holidays, but not until after the Civil war president had been termed a "Democrat" in debate over the proposal.

After Sen. Norman G. Flagg (R-Moro) said he was against designation of February 12 as a holiday because "Lincoln himself would have us pursue our usual work on that day," Senator Nicholas G. Hubbard (D-Mt. Pulaski), took issue with him:

"We ought to have more holidays," Senator Hubbard said. "And I think it is only fitting that we honor Abraham Lincoln, the third greatest Democrat, by making his birthday a holiday."

Senator Hubbard said Jefferson and Jackson ranked ahead of Lincoln as Democrats. Lincoln ran for President as the first Republican party candidate.

The holiday measure, already approved by the House, was passed 41 to 2 in the Senate and sent to Governor Green.

EVANSVILLE MUSEUM 8124217381 P. 66

LINCOLN AND JEFFERSON
Lithograph

24 1/2" x 16 7/8"
Kimmel and Foster

Published by Henry and William Vought in 1865, this was one of the final entries in Kimmel and Foster's lithographic series on the history of the Civil War. Contrary to the vengeance and bitterness of the time, this lithographs shows Lincoln and Jefferson in a very sympathetic mood.

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Jack L. Smith, South Bend, Indiana

A LINCOLN DEATH SCENE
Engraving

22 1/2" x 15 1/5"
A. H. Ritchie

This engraving portrays the people who were purportedly in the room where Lincoln died, 15 April 1865. Actually the room where Lincoln died was 10' x 15' making it improbable that all were in attendance at the same time.

The room where Lincoln died is located at the rear of the Peterson House across the street from Ford's Theater where the President was shot.

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Jack L. Smith, South Bend, Indiana

THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN
Lithograph

13 1/2" x 10"
Currier and Ives

Of the many prints produced immediately following the Lincoln's assassination, 14 April 1865, none were completely accurate. Though this print by Currier and Ives was more accurate than most, it too contained some fallacies. The most obvious inaccuracy is the absence of flags and a framed portrait of George Washington hanging from the front of Lincoln's box and Ford's Theater. Also, the transformation of the curtain at the viewer's right into an American flag is fallacious.

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Jack L. Smith, South Bend, Indiana

JEFFERSON THOMAS

DRAWING 26

COMPARISON

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